1: Meek E, G-5 (1925-1930) 1931
FF38 Katab FF38

"Ei, ee." *Obwai*: "Na mi kiang a zangat se zangat (indecent). Refrain: "Ei, ee."

The indecency of the songs sung at the public festivals is in striking contrast to the rules of decorum which govern the ordinary private life. This is not characteristic of the Katab, but may be said to be general of all Negro society. To brothers-in-law, for example, any jokes about sexual intercourse would, in the ordinary course, be taboo and wholly impossible. A man will bow down in humble subjection to his parents-in-law and avoid them on all possible occasions. But on the occasion of public festivals all the ordinary rules of private life are waived, and there is a saturnalia which permits a father-in-law to dance round in the same circle as his daughter-in-law, singing songs referring in the main to sexual matters. It is repugnant to any native to repeat in cold blood the words of these songs to a European, and it would be equally repugnant to him to use them at any other time than on the occasion of the public festival when, as of old among the Romans, free expression is given to the pent-up feelings. (In this connection we may instance cases where during public festivals, e.g. among the Gwari, it is permissible to abuse the Chief without fear of retaliation for all actions during the year which were regarded as unjust and tyrannical.) An *obwai* festival is also held at harvest, and a month before the feast his voice is heard warning the people to make preparations and desist from idle disputes.

There are among the Katab no elaborate rites of initiation into the cult of *obwai*. Children are taken to his hut at an early age (4–8), warned to be obedient to their parents and given food. The short ceremony is concluded by a form of baptism in a stream, the smearing of the boys' heads with mahogany oil, and a feast in the village. It may be of interest to mention here the part that the *obwai* plays among the neighbouring Jaba tribe in the matter of initiation. These initiation rites among the Jaba have no connection with circumcision. They are performed when the lad is between 9 and 11 years of age. Among the Jaba, the *obwai* is known as the *Ku*[1] and the initiation rites are known as *woroku*. A noteworthy feature is that the lad is initiated not by his father, but by his maternal uncle. The father has no say in the matter. The lad goes to his maternal uncle's house, and the uncle provides the preliminary fee of one chicken. He

[1] This is a Jukun and apparently also an Ancient Egyptian term. See Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 263.